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RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 5764  
RUEHHE/AMEMBASSY HELSINKI 3038  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 GENEVA 001128

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/23/2018

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [RS](#) [GG](#)

SUBJECT: DECEMBER 17-18 GENEVA TALKS ON GEORGIA: SECURITY  
WORKING GROUP

REF: GENEVA 893

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Mark C. Storella, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (SBU) Summary: During the December 17-18 Geneva Talks on Georgia, the parties in the Security Working Group failed to reach agreement on a draft paper that would have established an "Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism." The Mechanism would have consisted of weekly consultative meetings along the administrative boundaries of South Ossetia and Abkhazia among local law enforcement structures (Georgian and separatist), Russian forces, and the three international monitoring organizations: the European Union Monitoring Mission (EUMM), UNOMIG, and the OSCE. The EU proposal also envisioned joint investigations of incidents to provide greater transparency and de-escalate tensions. During the final minutes before the concluding press conference, the Russian, South Ossetian and Abkhaz representatives vetoed several compromise variants proposed by EU Special Envoy Morel and UN Special Representative Verbeke by insisting categorically on striking any reference to "joint visits" to the sites of incidents. No plenary or informational session was held. The next round of talks will take place in Geneva on February 17-18, 2009. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Grigori Karasin expressed his view that the talks could continue after the next meeting in February, but only every six months. End Summary.

12. (SBU) Participants of the Security Working Group included the three Co-Chairs -- EU Special Envoy Pierre Morel, UN Special Representative Johan Verbeke, and OSCE Special Envoy Heikki Talvitie -- as well as EUMM Head Hansjoerg Haber, OSCE Head of Mission to Georgia Terhi Hakala, and incoming Greek Special Envoy Charalampos Christopoulos. The separatist South Ossetian representatives included de facto "Acting Prime Minister" Boris Chochiev and de facto "Foreign Minister" Murat Dzhioyev; the separatist Abkhaz authorities were represented by de facto "Presidential advisor" Vyacheslav Chirigba. The Georgian delegation was headed by Deputy Foreign Minister (DFM) Giga Bokeria, and included Ministry of Internal Affairs Spokesman Shota Utiashvili, Mission to the OSCE DCM Paata Gaprindashvili, former Head of the Temporary Administrative Unit for South Ossetia Dmitri Sanakoyev, and Abkhaz government-in-exile leader Ada Marshania. The Russian delegation was headed by DFM Grigori Karasin, and included MFA 4th CIS Department Head Andrei Kelin, and MFA Regional Conflicts Head Alexei Dvinyanin. The U.S. delegation was led by EUR Assistant Secretary Daniel Fried, and included EUR/CARC Regional Conflicts Advisor Mike Carpenter, and Embassy Tbilisi Poloff David Gehrenbeck.

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13. (SBU) Morel began the Working Group on Security by telling the parties they faced an "emergency situation" along the administrative boundaries of South Ossetia and Abkhazia due to the increasing frequency of violent incidents. Repeated shootings, obstacles to crossing the administrative boundaries, and tensions among the local population in Akhagori, Perevi, and Ganmukhuri made the creation of an Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism imperative. Verbeke echoed Morel's appeal and called for a simple, practical, workable mechanism. EUR A/S Fried noted that incidents on the ground can lead to catastrophic results and said the U.S. would work constructively with all the participants to support the EU's proposal for a practical mechanism without prejudice to deeper disagreements about status. Bokeria welcomed all the participants and raised the issue of daily attacks near Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the departure of civilians from the Akhagori region, the denial of access for international monitors and local populations to South Ossetia, and forced "passportization" within the occupied regions. Bokeria endorsed the EU's proposed mechanism, noting that the investigative aspect was crucial, and that the mechanism should grant access for its participants to all of Georgia, including its occupied regions.

14. (SBU) In contrast to all previous speakers, Chochiev harshly criticized the EU's proposed mechanism, noting (illogically) that it ignored Georgia's growing military

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presence around South Ossetia. Chochiev also claimed that Perevi was within the territory of South Ossetia, accused the U.S. of continuing to train and equip Georgian forces, and criticized Russia for withdrawing too hastily from the "buffer zone" around South Ossetia. Finally, Chochiev proposed merging the Working Groups on Security and IDPs, arguing that there was no point in discussing the return of "refugees" (sic) until security was restored. Georgia's former Temporary Administrative Head for South Ossetia Dmitri Sanakoyev responded with a measured tone, praising the proposed mechanism as a way to help prevent crimes on both sides of the administrative boundary. Abkhaz de facto representative Chirigba said he supported the mechanism, but noted that it should be preceded by a formal Non-Use of Force pledge by the Georgian government. Karasin criticized Bokeria for using the term "occupied regions" to refer to "independent states," echoed Chochiev's call for a Non-Use of Force pledge from Georgia, and called for a demilitarized "buffer zones" in Georgia around South Ossetia and Abkhazia as well as an embargo against offensive weaponry for Georgia.

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Joint Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism  
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15. (SBU) After the initial round of presentations, the Working Group settled into a discussion of the text of the EU proposal for a Joint Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism, which continued in a working-level format late into the evening and again the following day in a "principals plus one" format. After lengthy negotiations, the parties finally agreed on a text with two sets of bracketed language. The first bracketed text referred to the participants of the Mechanism as "representatives of relevant structures with responsibility for security and public order in the relevant areas." The South Ossetian and Abkhaz representatives ultimately rejected this language and insisted on returning to a previous reference (which had been traded for something else) to "South Ossetian" and "Abkhaz" law enforcement structures. The second set of bracketed language concerned "joint visits" to the sites of incidents. Even after Verbeke proposed that the joint visits could be modified with the qualifier "as appropriate," Karasin noted that he could not

agree to the language (supported in his objection by the South Ossetian and Abkhaz representatives).

¶6. (C) The final working session on the text left EU Special Envoy Morel so exasperated with South Ossetian representative Chochiev that he on several occasions he turned red and raised his voice beyond a conversational tone to berate Chochiev for his intransigence. Throughout the discussions, the Georgian representatives agreed to Morel's and Verbeke's compromise proposals that substantially watered down the authority of the mechanism, including a reference to the goal of facilitating the "free movement of persons," "access for international missions to the sites of incidents," and "visits by the participants in the mechanism to areas of common concern."

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Comment  
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¶7. (C) The modest effort towards creating an Incident Response and Prevention Mechanism consumed the entire two days of the talks, and relegated the pressing issue of the OSCE Mission to Georgia's mandate renewal to the sidelines. The intransigence and continued politicization of the talks by the South Ossetian and Abkhaz representatives pushed EU Special Envoy Morel to the limits of his patience. Visibly exasperated at times, Morel tried to forge a compromise until the last possible moment, even as the scope of the Incident Response Mechanism became increasingly restricted. The talks ended only when the Abkhaz and South Ossetians categorically refused to allow for the mechanism to meet inside South Ossetia or Abkhazia. Although Russian DFM Karasin tried to sound a constructive note throughout the talks, his hand was forced in the final negotiating session when he refused to accept any reference to possible access inside the two regions (even in a non-binding manner). Separately, outside the formal talks, the Abkhaz representatives avoided even an informal meeting with members of the U.S. delegation, suggesting mounting pressure on the separatist representatives not to seek any compromises not approved by the highest authorities.

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